

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Kato Engineering

Enterprise Minnesota

Kato Engineering Implements 5S Kaizen to Improve Workspace

Client Profile:

Kato Engineering manufactures and sells precision-engineered, AC generators, motor-generator sets and controls for prime, standby, and peak shaving power generation. Kato Engineering's generators, which range in power from 200 kW to 15 MW, can be used anywhere for backup or primary power. They are a preferred supplier of the U.S. Navy and used on as many as 90 percent of U.S. land drilling rigs. Based in North Mankato, Minnesota, Kato Engineering employs 325 people.

Situation:

Kato has been a long-term client of Enterprise Minnesota, a NIST MEP network affiliate, on their lean journey to transform business, reduce waste, and increase efficiencies. With predictions that market demand for its generators would increase in future years, Kato wanted to boost production before it became overwhelmed without having to expand into any new space. Realizing that they could better utilize space by addressing the problem of organization on the work floor, the company decided to plan a 5S Kaizen Blitz, an intensive event that focuses on improving one of the business, with the help of Enterprise Minnesota.

Solution:

Kato Engineering uses the 5S system (Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain) in its Kaizen Blitzes. The goal of 5S is to gain efficiency through organization and improve communication between those sharing a production resource. Typically, companies using this system have been able to increase capacity 15 to 25 percent without further capital investments.

Enterprise Minnesota and Kato Engineering formed a seven-member Kaizen team whose first mission was to bring more efficient flow to the Vacuum Pressure Impregnation (VPI) and Oven area of the shop floor, a particularly messy area that provides insulation for the coils in Kato Engineering's generators. It is an area where there are three chambers, each processing one part at a time. While this meant that the processes were mostly defined, they still had room to improve in organization, orderliness, and cleanliness. As a result of the Kaizen 5S blitz, Kato Engineering removed duplicate and triplicate work equipment, saving space in the VPI and oven area. With the extra equipment, they were able to supply other areas with tools, saving costs of replacement or new equipment. The team organized the workspace by laying down lines on the floor for parking equipment and storage, and replaced old storage racks with new fixtures. Kato Engineering's new storage took up one-third the space as before the Kaizen blitz, saving them valuable space and reducing need for a costly new facility addition.

Results:

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- * Reduced need for a costly new facility addition.
- * Reduced floor space required for storage by one-third.
- * Improved organization of tools and equipment.

Testimonial:

"Our workers appreciate the results. They have extra space and better organization, which gives them more room to work and operate in. It's just easier to work in an area and keep it clean and organized now. "

Mike Miner, Principle Manufacturing Engineer